Injury, Restoration and Recovery of Fish and Wildlife Resources Following the Olympic Pipeline Gasoline Spill in Whatcom Creek, Bellingham, Washington

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On June 10, 1999, a pipeline owned and operated by Olympic Pipeline Company (OPL) ruptured and spilled approximately 277,000 gallons of gasoline into Hannah and Whatcom Creeks in Bellingham, Washington. The gasoline flowed downstream and exploded, burning over 25 acres of riparian habitat and impacting over three miles of stream. Immediately following the spill, natural resource trustees and OPL began cooperative surveys to assess natural resource injuries and to identify emergency remediation and restoration actions in the stream. The objectives of this presentation are to discuss results of fish and wildlife injury assessments, to describe some of the emergency restoration efforts, and to discuss results of ongoing monitoring studies.

Results of stream surveys indicate that the aquatic ecosystem was severely impacted by the incident. Over 100,000 dead fish (including salmon and trout), aquatic invertebrates, amphibians, birds and mammals were found in 3 miles of creek downstream of the spill.

Since the spill, a variety of in-stream remediation and habitat improvements have been implemented. Ongoing monitoring studies suggest that the stream community is beginning to recover and that remediation and restoration efforts have helped. Full recovery is expected to take years and long-term restoration projects are now being planned.

The cooperative working relationship between resource trustees and OPL has helped facilitate rapid implementation of restoration projects in the creek. The lessons learned in this incident can serve as a model for future spills.

Spill Prevention...Knowing What To Do Isn't Enough!

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You are now a marina manager. Boaters look to you for safe moorage and a place to store and maintain their boats while the general public increasingly assumes that your facilities will provide access to their waters. Your professional life has become more complex in recent years as greater emphasis has been placed on water quality issues and the sustainability and survival of many marine resources. As a marina manager you are confronted with many, and often conflicting, user needs. Your marina and repair facilities are under greater public and agency scrutiny. How do you respond to these pressures to meet boater demands for service while preserving the quality of your marina environment?

Knowing effective oil spill prevention and response measures may let you sleep soundly, but it may be time to wake up to how local, state and federal enforcement agencies view the adequacy of your plans. All marinas need a written spill prevention and response plan that must include sound best management practices, BMPs, and valid spill notification and response procedures that include staff training and drills. The development of these plans must start with a complete audit of your facility and adjacent operations and also address the risks posed by moored and transient vessels and their maintenance activities. After you assess the extent of your exposure to these spill risks, it is time to meet with your staff to develop the initial draft of your plan–the blueprint for meeting both regulatory and environmental stewardship obligations and minimizing your exposure to liability and risk.